

# Innovations

## **Phraseology Concepts of “Brain” and “Heart”: The Religious, Yoruba and English Cultures and Language Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

*This study tries to verify the similar and peculiarities of concepts of “brain” and “heart” vis-à-vis religion, Yoruba and English cultures and languages based on semantics, idiomatic expressions, phraseology, among other units of religion and the two languages. The study is a descriptive qualitative survey that relied on secondary source of data. The various entries in this study triggered the conclusion about how rich the Islamic, Yoruba, English cultures and languages are by using and showing various dimensions and ways these two concepts of brain and heart are used independently from the point of view of languages and Islamic cultures. The Islamic Religion and the two languages exhibited the use of figurative expressions, phraseology and other deeper usages of the concepts, among several others. Based on this therefore, it was*

*recommended that concepts of “brain” and “heart”(“al-Aql” and “al-Qalb”), (“okan” and “opolo”) have opened up a wide field for further research especially in the areas of psychology, anthropology, linguoculturology and ethnoculturology, among several other areas of academic endeavour more so that qalb is regarded as an instrument through which man determines what is good or bad, right or wrong and truth or falsehood while on the other hand, the heart is seen as the vehicle or the custodian of piety which must be purified, and as such researchers are implored to carry out studies on these areas so that academic endeavours would complement the religious aspects of human existence and vice versa..*

**Keywords:** Concepts of “brain”& “heart”, “qalb&aql”, language, cultural perspectives, “linguoculturology” and “ethnoculturology”.

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## **Introduction**

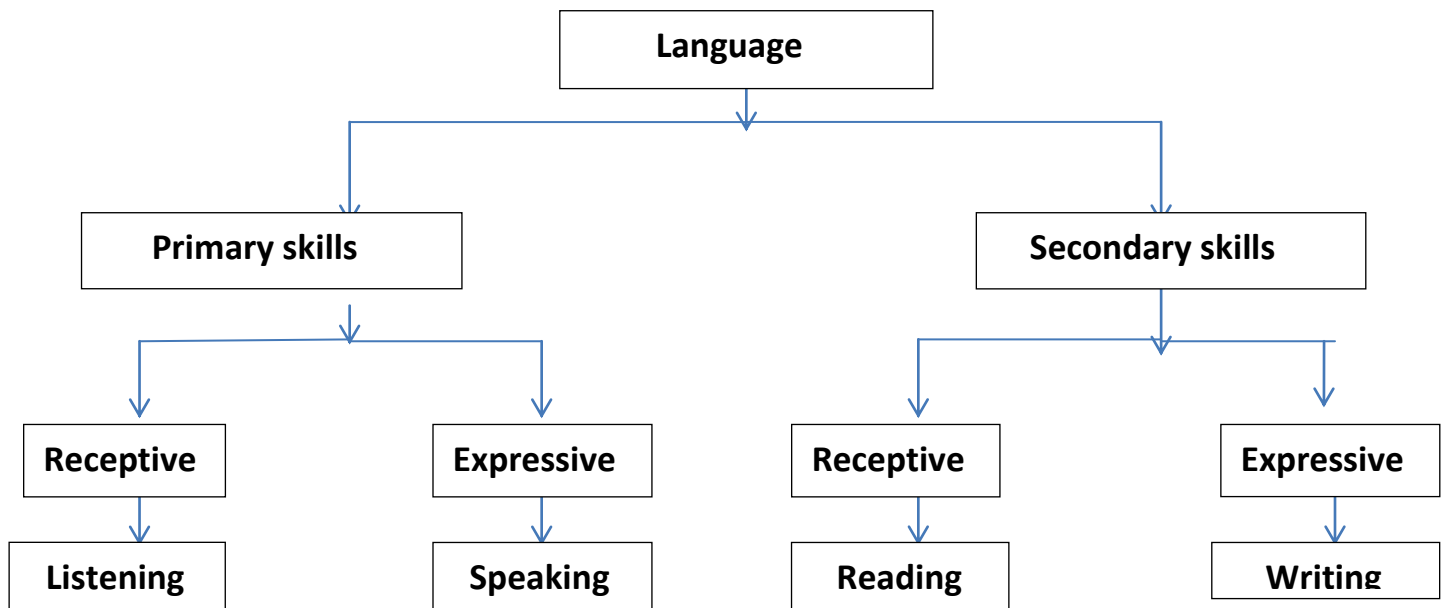
Language is an instrument of thought or concept. It gives a vivid and clear expression to human thoughts. Language has a great influence on human thinking and human interaction. From whatever angle one looks at language, three basic words stand out, they are “human”, “expression” and “communication”. The term human to the concept of language implies that only human beings use language as a means of communication. Animals do communicate using sounds but their communication differs from that of human language. The term expression involves a linguistic reaction to say a thought, and beautiful sight such as beholding the sunset – what a beautiful sight! Communication, which may be linguistic or non-linguistic, denotes conveyance of feelings, ideas or thoughts from one individual to another (Odukoya, Omonijo, & Oraetue, 2020). Communication can therefore take place between humans, or between animals and even between human and animals, but language is human specific.

In another development, Bello (2016) sees language as the complex and subtle activity that human beings engage in, using the vocal cords in interactive communication or when one speaks to oneself. In other words, language serves as a tool of giving expression to our thoughts either for others to hear and respond to, just listening to without responding or in a situation of soliloquy. There is creativity involved in language as the interlocutors involved respond, disagree or suggest alternatives to the coded messages. This implies that human being control an unlimited set of discrete signals and can produce infinite utterances from a set of finite rules.

Etymologically, linguists have come to realise that most theories about the origin of language are mere plausible speculations since there hardly exists

evidence to back such claim. The concern now is to look at language as it is and describe it in the cultural perspective.

In a similar vein, “qalb” in Arabic is known as the heart. It is fundamental and central to human intentions, actions and the reflections of various activities surrounding us. Indeed, Allah mentioned “qalb” in 120 places in the Qur’an. Etymologically, the term “qalb” means to rotate or change the position from one state or positions to another. This implies that the “qalb” is guided by the events, circumstances or experience to determine whether its status. In a related development, the term “aql” is an Arabic word which implied the “brain” in English. “Aql” is derived from the root word “ql” which literally means to bind or the faculty that connects individual to Allah. It is mentioned 49 times in the Qur’an.



**Fig. 1: The communicative skills**

Listening, the base or the foundation of the four communicative skills, the eyes and the ears perceive and receive “snapshots” and sound waves from the environment. These sound waves are sent to the brain, which interprets and sends back messages and thoughts to the necessary sensory organs. Listening is an active process, which involves not only hearing but also making meaning of what is heard. Hearing, according to Osita *et al* (2013) and Ahmed and Hassan (2020), is different

from listening. Hearing is the physical ability to receive sound waves to the brain; listening is the mental ability to pay attention to the message carried by those sound waves. All these are possible with a stable state of the mind.

Speaking, which is the second stage of the communicative skills hierarchically is the ability to replicate what the mind has conceived through the listening skill. Technically speaking, a language is made up of several parts of speech. These include grammatical words such as prepositions, articles, tenses, moods, plurals, etc.; and lexical words entailing nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. The latter category is also termed by pragmatists as constituting conceptual terms, i.e. they designate or denote objects in the world. Upon hearing a lexical item one can associate it with a particular concept. Conversely, the former category of words does not create concepts, but rather, indicate how we should relate the concepts between them. Language, according to Almasly (2016) and Achike (2020), is obviously an essential tool in every day human activities as people communicate with others through language. The study of both linguistic and neurology has made significant contributions to the understanding of language.

In particular, neurolinguists have attempted to investigate the relationship between language and the brain. However, Whitaker (1971) and Adeosun and Ebite (2023) contend that research in the fields of linguistic and neurology is rather difficult due to limited available of data. The study of the relationship between language and the brain began in 1836 when Dax read a short paper on it at a medical society meeting in Montpellier, France.

The brain is one of the most important parts of human anatomy, and it plays a key role in stabilising and controlling human behaviour. The brain, according to Obler and Gjerlow (1999) and Aziz, Ahmadian and Miri (2020), has the ability to guide and direct every single part of human body. The brain is indeed an extremely sophisticated sponge-like structure that also resembles two halves with a slight gap between them, known as cerebral hemispheres. The two cerebral hemispheres are referred to as the left and right hemispheres respectively. The cerebral hemispheres are connected by the corpus callosum. The surface of the cerebral hemisphere is referred to as cortex while the “grey matter” areas lie inside the cerebral hemisphere. Both the cortical and the sub-cortical areas play a key role in language (Sinatra & Gemake, 1983; Obler & Gjerlow, 1999 and Avazjonovna, 2021). Motor movement and language mechanisms are controlled by common areas of the brain. According to Thompson and Green (1982) and Damnet (2021), at the central area, the cortex seems to be the primary area for the generation of language and also it is involved in the consequencing of motor movements and the decoding of speech sound. At the sub-cortical region is a common mechanism for attention, a

mechanism important for motor learning, memory and language. (Obler & Gjerlow, 1999) argue that there are several essential areas of the brain which are responsible for different language skills.

Cultural differences have been noted in the way in which it is used pragmatically. In cultures generally, skills are typically taught and learned through verbal instruction, whereas, in some cultures, new skills are learned through verbal observation. Similarly, differences in the social roles of adults and children also influence how language is used. Home and school contexts may represent different cultures, sub-cultures, or both, and may influence language acquisition in noticeable ways. Non-verbal cues such as facial expression have different communicative roles in different cultures. In some cultures, pre-linguistic children who are not yet verbalising are spoken about rather than spoken to. Language and culture on the other hand, are intertwined like the two sides of the same sheet of paper. They breathe, blossom, shrivel up and die due to many reasons. Both of them are sensitive and can adapt to prevailing circumstances. Language gives full expression to people's values and norms; and since values and norms are dynamic by nature, language has to be in agreement with cultural transformations. Technological, political, economic and social innovations require language to enrich its lexicon to capture life realities. Indeed, human mind creates mental representations of values courtesy of language. The collapse of a value system may sound the death knell to the language in question. The death of a culture will almost certainly be followed by the demise of the language associated with that culture.

By concepts, they exist in the mind as abstract entities independent of terms used to express or emphasise them. As such, the concepts "brain" and "heart" could be viewed as being abstract ideas, mental symbols, units of ideas or thoughts associated with corresponding representations in language and culture that could imply that all objects are given in category or class of entities, phenomena or relationships between them and are viewed through mentally combining some or all the characteristics of a concrete or abstract, real or imaginary objects. The meaningful contents of the key concepts determine cultural concept sphere that demonstrate, guides national or geographical cultural heritage. By considering the concept sphere and defining linguistic means verbalising concepts we can reveal peculiar national and cultural values perceived by this ethnos, this notion is also supported by Derakhshanti and Shakki (2021) and Erkulova (2021).

Concepts "*brain*" and "*heart*" are confirmed as the existence and certain relationship between these concepts in linguistic cultures. The research on concepts "*brain*" and "*heart*" as images of culture, forming the basis of Yoruba (a tribe in Nigeria), English and Arabic national pictures of the sphere are three fundamental

cultural concepts. These concepts help to identify the ethnic peculiarities of thinking and spiritual life of the people. However, the values, norms and cultural practices of international communities have attracted more and more scholars, as it has become evident that the critical look at their problems requires expertise from all cultural practices to vividly project what is meant by “*brain*” and “*heart*” from the perspectives of language and culture. There are grounds for supposing that studying of a foreign language without supplying some cultural awareness is not enough to provide mutual benefits in the international relationships. This therefore, serves as a starting point for the origin of a few challenges or study. Consequently, the presence of “*linguoculturology*” (the study of linguistics and culture) is an appropriate result of developing philosophic and linguistic bases. Basically, the proposition that there is a correlation between language and culture can be traced to the views of Humboldt, who posits that the better we make friends with other people’s culture the more successful we shall be in mastering language (Esfahlan & Borounmand, 2020). Maslova (2001) and Igboanusi (2002) point out that the following objects of cultural linguistics such as words and phrases which have no equivalent in another languages, archetypes, rituals, beliefs and superstitions do reflect in languages; there are proverbs and wise-sayings; idiomatic expressions also abound; symbols and stereotypes; metaphors and imageries, among others are found in languages of the world. Sultagubiyeva *et al* (2015), Gaemi and Bayati (2022) argue that in spite of the present state of linguoculturology research that is characterised by lack of general methodological foundations and common conceptual approaches, there is no clear theoretical basis, commonly accepted terminology, fundamental assumptions which would allow representatives of different directions and trends to achieve mutual understanding. However, opinions differ as what to be seen as linguoculturology and some investigators ignore the fact that linguoculturology study is an independent as an independent area with its own system of notion and an impressive history of scholarly research. Nevertheless, “*linguoculturology*” has its own conceptual apparatus and the notion “*concept*” which inadvertently becomes the base of synthesis research Heba, Rafti & Caushaj (2020).

Sultagubiyeva *et al* (2015); Kaharuddin and Hasyim (2020) and Khakzad and Esfahlan and Brounmand (2020) posit that cognitive-discourse paradigm has become a tradition, and in the context of its priorities, the concept language, is therefore, not considered as something that exists “in itself and for itself”. The term “*concept*” has gained prominence in the field of science which is the crystallisation of thought. The image of the concept is seen as a bilateral unit of idea of knowledge geared toward language/culture on one hand and attitudinal mental world of man (Vorobyev, 2000). In another development, studies by Shmelev and Stivpanov in Sultagubiyeva *et al* indicate that the concept, “a bunch of culture in human consciousness” shows the

basic concepts that exist in each person are not only universal, but they are national and specific. As such, concepts “*brain*” and “*heart*” which are bright and versatile represent the phraseology and are characterised by numerous thoughts, ideas and signs, in other words, they are abstract in nature, and are closely connected with the inner world view of man to express emotions, characters, moods and feelings. The level of correlations of concepts of “*brain*” and “*heart*” are in the part of phraseological units in Yoruba, Arabic and English languages and are allowed to trace the associative-shape of concepts, possible convergence and divergence in the studied languages and cultures. The central, main and engine rooms of the human body which are the brain and heart serve semantically as keywords to human existence. The brain is the central organ in the head in the form of a sponge-like entity that controls human thought, feelings, abilities and imaginations, while the heart is seen, also as the central organ in the circulatory system in the form of a hollow muscular bag that provides blood to the entire human body. The combination of the two organs takes care of man’s feelings, thoughts, emotions, moods, ability to love, hate, among several other things. These concepts occupy very unique place in the language and cultural points of view of Yoruba, Arabic and English languages. These organs are identified with the personality of man and his life (Mavrou, 2020; Mushtaq & Maryam 2021; Nugroho, Astuti & Atmojo, 2021 and Tulasi & Murthy, 2022).

The concept of *qalb* (heart) in classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship had been a subject of debate of which several scholars had critically examined it. Seker (2012) defined the *Qalb* (heart) as the Divine subtle faculty. He added that the “*qalb*” can be described in two perspectives i.e. the social and individual planes. Furthermore, the Qur’an and the Hadith of the Prophet never underestimated the importance and unique nature of the heart such that Allah mentioned in Q.49:7, Q. 58:22, Q.5:41 and Q.33:53. Allah (SWT) had blessed human beings with the “*qalb*” to distinguish man from other living creatures. The word “*qalb*” literally means turning something inside out, inverting and transforming (Muhammad, n.d.). The “*qalb*” is an instrument through which man determines what is good or bad, right or wrong and truth or falsehood. Indeed, the heart is the vehicle or the custodian of piety which must be purified (Q.5:41; & Q. 33.53). Similarly, the “*qalb*” is the cardinal force to identify the state of belief and the unbelievers.

However, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali(1996) opines that the “*qalb*” (heart) and “*aql*” (brain) are two terms often used interchangeably but different in some dimensions. Though, he refers to the two concepts as “Divine subtle faculty”. Abu Husayn al-Nuri in his work, *Maqamat al-Qulub* (stations of the hearts) and Hakim al-Tirmidhi who also worked on *al-bayan al-farq bayn al-sadr wa-alqalbwa-al-fu’ad wa-*

*al-lubb* (a Sufi treaties on the differences between *sadr*, *qalb*, the *fuad* and *lubb*) posit that the *qalb* is Allah's throne which is unarguably the only place that can contain Him. Allah always wants the heart of His servants to be devoted to Him at all times. Hence, Allah says "the believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited to them, it increases them in faith; and upon their Lord they rely" (Q.8:2).

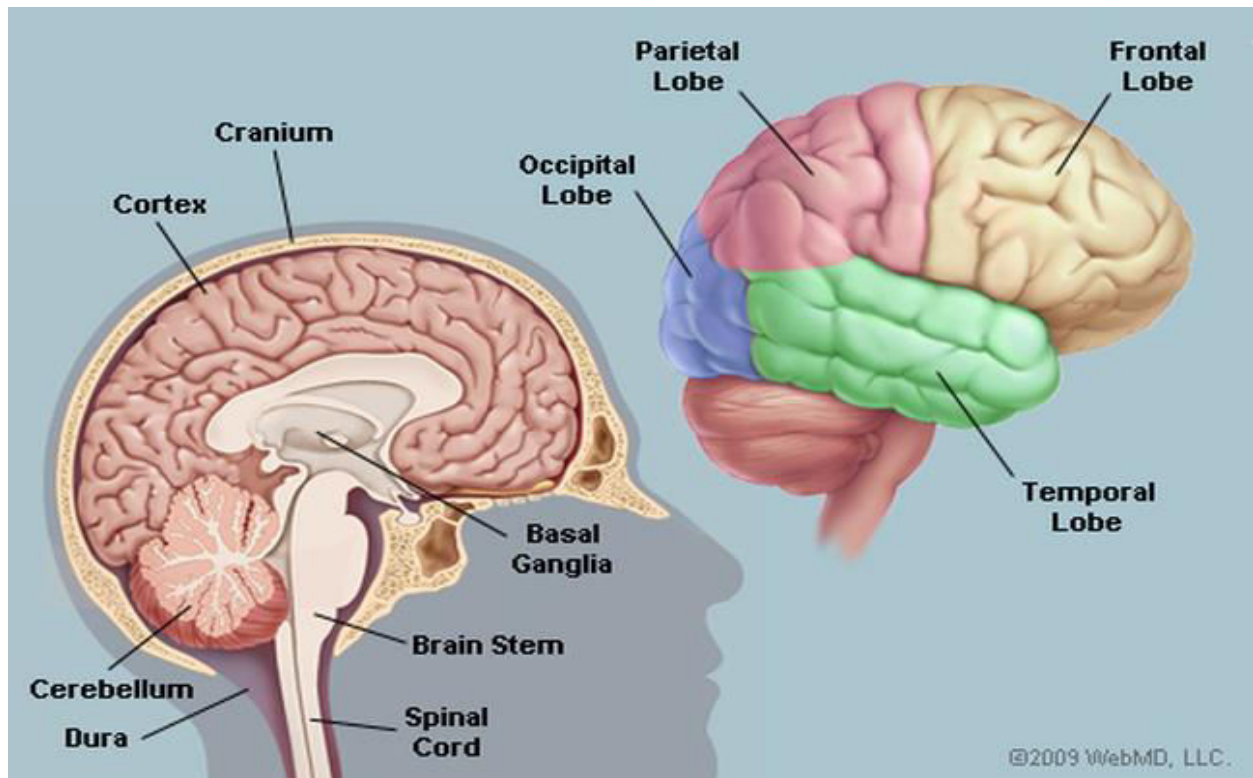
In a similar vein, Allah had given *manal-aql* (brain) to think, reflect and decide what he thinks is the best for him on earth. Sometimes in the Qur'an, "aql" is used synonymously with the word "lub" (a singular form of "alalbab"). So, the word "ulu al-albab" can be defined as "people who have intelligence (aql)". This can be found in the Q.3:190-191: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Whosoever remembers Allah while standing or sitting or (lying) on his sides and gives thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying), 'Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You (above such a thing); then protect us from the punishment of the Fire. It is pertinent to note that both the *qalb* (heart) and *aql* (brain) are very important and constitute major factors that distinguish man from other creatures of Allah (Rassool, 2023).

### **Methodology**

This study is a descriptive qualitative research type that relied on secondary source data. At the Yoruba realm, these two organs are known as "opolo" and "okan" i.e. brain and heart while in Arabic they are regarded as "qalb" (heart) and "aql" (brain) respectively. They are well valued, and as such, serve as life-wires of the human body system, and so they are represented in the phraseological trends of Arabic, Yoruba and English languages. To the languages, wise-sayings, idiomatic expressions, phraseologies, metaphors, proverbs, among others are valuable sources of information about the culture and beliefs of the Yoruba people. The Yoruba people, in their wisdom use the two concepts "*brain*" and "*heart*" vis-à-vis language and culture thus:



### A. “Opolo” (Brain)

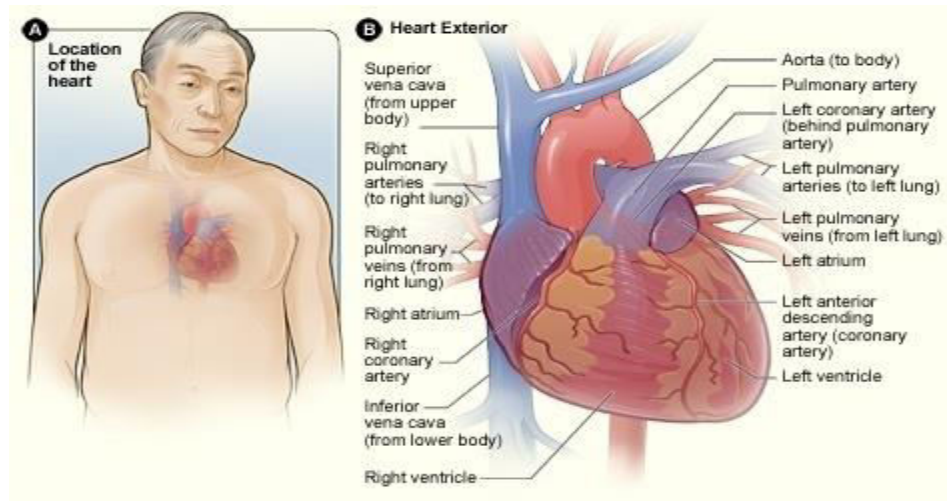


**Fig. 2: The human brain (Opolo)**

1. “Opolo” (brain) is one of the central engine rooms of the human being that operates with human thoughts
2. “Opolo” (brain) is responsible for man’s ability to differentiate and appreciate things
3. “Opolo” (brain) is man’s sensory organ that receives and sends messages to all parts of the body through the nerves
4. “Opolo” (brain) is the operator and generator of human activities
5. “Opolo” (brain) is the pointer to human brilliance and, or otherwise
6. “Opolo” (brain) is responsible for approval or disapproval of things happening around man
7. “Opolo” (brain) is the chief controller of human speech
8. “Opolo” (brain) distinguishes man (higher animal) from animal (lower animal)

9. “Opolo” (brain) leads to intelligence which makes man to learn quickly and think about things in a logical and intelligent way
10. “Opolo” (brain) is capable of engaging man in temporary forgetfulness so that new things are learned
11. “Opolo” (brain) is a pointer to the fact that any being with sharp intelligence is regarded as a complete being regardless of deformity or infirmity
12. “Olopolo pipe” (brain) an intellectual
13. “Ologbon” (brain) the wise one
14. “Oloye” (brain) having foresight
15. “Amoye” (brain) one that has foresight
16. “O ni ogbon bi Solomoni” (brain) as wise as Solomon, among several others.

### B. “Okan” (Heart)



**Fig. 3: The human heart (Okan)**

1. “Okan” (heart) is capable of being patient “o ni suuru”
2. “Okan” (heart) directs one to behave well
3. “Okan” (heart) exhibits love, affection and being modest
4. “Okan” (heart) shows sympathy and empathy
5. “Okan” (heart) shows fear, feeling, anxiety that makes one eats one’s heart out; makes one have his heart in his boot, etc
6. “Okan” (heart) is the entity in man that makes man to be responsible for the feelings towards a fellow man, his emotions, moods and capability for love and compassion
7. “Okan” (heart) sees and admires by saying “o dara bi egbin” as beautiful as a zebra

8. "Okan" (heart) shows sorrow...heart bleeds
9. "Okan" (heart) misfortunes are shown by the heart...heart-break
10. "Okan" (heart) shows kindness...kind hearted
11. "Okan" (heart) shows or expresses generosity
12. "Okan" (heart) expresses concern...so sorry, dear
13. "Okan" (heart) expresses joy, fun...glad to see you
14. "Okan" (heart) "okan eni ni alufa eni" i.e. one's belief is resident in one's heart
15. "Okan" (heart) "okan ko ni egun" i.e. the heart is feeble (boneless)
16. "Okan" (heart) "okan mi ko tan mi je" i.e. my heart did not deceive me, among several other examples.

## Conclusion

Entries from this study show how rich Islamic position, Yoruba and English languages are by using and showing various dimensions and ways these two concepts of brain and heart are used independently from the point of view of Islam, language and culture. The two concepts exhibited the use of figurative expressions, phraseology and other deeper usages of the concepts.

## Recommendations

These concepts "brain" ("qalb") and "heart" ("aql") ("okan" and "opolo") have opened up a wide field for further research especially in the areas of psychology, anthropology, linguoculturology and ethnoculturology, among several other areas of academic endeavour more so that "qalb" is an instrument through which man determines what is good or bad, right or wrong and truth or falsehood while the heart is the vehicle or the custodian of piety which must be purified.

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